

Step 1: Annotating Guidelines

1. Read the op-ed once.
2. Number each paragraph chronologically.
3. Reread and fully annotate the piece.
 - a. **The title.**
 - i. Draw a box around it.
 - ii. Write two alternate titles for the piece.
 - b. **The thesis.**
 - i. Draw a two-line box around it.
 - c. **The tip-off words.**
 - i. Circle all verbs, adverbs, and adjectives that imply or explicitly convey the writer's attitude/tone.
 - d. **The opening and closing paragraphs.**
 - i. In a few words, summarize in the margin how the opening paragraph relates to the argument of the editorial—the author's chief criticism.
 - ii. Then turn to the closing paragraph: What does it accomplish for the writer? -How should we act?
 - e. **Unfamiliar words.**
 - i. Write the definitions of unfamiliar words next to the words themselves.
 - f. **Unfamiliar and half-familiar references.**
 - i. Briefly indicate in the margin what a reference means and how the reference clarifies and supports the writer's argument.

Step 2: Argument Map Guidelines

1. *What is the subject?*

Try to answer this question with a degree of specificity that matches that of the op-ed. For example, if the op-ed is about education, is it about secondary education? Assessment of learning in secondary schools? Improvement of learning outcomes in inner-city schools? Match your answer to the particular area of concern in the editorial.

2. *Who (or what) is the writer criticizing?*

Most editorials are critical of a person, a group, a way of thinking and acting, or a policy. Try to pinpoint who or what the writer of this editorial is criticizing.

3. *What is the writer recommending?*

Editorials are calls to action. Writers are creating arguments with the hope that readers will think, act, or feel a particular way (sometimes all three). Editorials are for a general audience, of course, since they are published in newspapers, but the recommendation may be for a particular group or person whose change of heart and mind would make the biggest difference.

4. *What is the evidence for the criticism?*

Editorial writers use evidence to support their criticisms. The careful, specific, and objective use of evidence allows writers to move from mere opinion to an argument compelling enough to change others' opinions. In this box, summarize briefly the types and sources of evidence you see in the editorial. Some types are listed below:

- Statistical evidence (name the source(s))
- Quotations (from which parties? Authorities? Laypeople? Contemporaries or deceased authors?)
- Historical facts
- Extended examples, in which one situation is described in great detail

Be sure that you have noted ALL the kinds of evidence the author uses to defend the criticism, rather than focusing on one kind of evidence.

5. **What is the evidence for the recommendation (if different from #4)?**

It may be the case that the writer is not only criticizing a policy or a person but actually recommending a course of action. If so, what evidence does the writer provide to make you consider that recommendation the right one?

6. **What is the purpose of the editorial?**

Identify the central purpose of the op-ed. What change (of thinking, of policy, of behavior) is the writer trying to effect?

7. **Who is the audience?**

Try to identify the specific audience(s) for the the op-ed beyond “general reader.” Is the audience legislators? A particular group of legislators? Democrats? Republicans? Voters in a particular election? Women? Men? Educational reformers? Physicians? Young people?

Step 3: Summarize the Argument: Précis (PRAY-see)

Now that you have annotated and mapped the argument of the op-ed, you’re ready to translate the argument into writing. The form for this translation is the précis (PRAY-see), defined by Webster’s as “a concise summary of essential points, statements, or facts.” The précis is the ultimate test of your understanding of another’s argument, for it requires you to represent that argument with a gemlike clarity and a gemlike precision. Practiced conscientiously, the précis will teach you how to distill every argument to its essence. And once you are able to understand and summarize other writers’ arguments, you will be far better prepared to compose arguments of your own. In *American Composition and Rhetoric* (1968), Donald Davidson describes the essential features and virtues of the précis:

“A précis is not an outline, but a summary or digest. It is useful as an exercise in grasping the essential ideas of an already completed composition and in stating these ideas in concentrated form. The précis shears away all elaborations of the thought and gives only what is left, in such a way as to make the summary a complete composition.”

In other words, the précis is a **neatly articulated miniature of the original text. In this case, your précis should not exceed 175 words, or 10% of the length of the average op-ed. Your goal is to capture the argument while still observing the 175-word length restriction.** To achieve that goal, you should structure your précis so that it executes each of the steps below:

Rubric for Précis Exercises

The following elements are required:

1. A précis on an article for the specified date
2. A first sentence that cites each of the following:
 - a. Article title
 - b. Publication and date
 - c. Author(s)
 - d. Example: In “Beyond the ‘Matrix’ Theory of the Human Mind” (*The New York Times*, 5/28/23), Ezra Klein...
3. A first sentence that expresses the main claim of the article in the précis writer’s words
4. Description of the author’s evidence (“author” refers to the author of *The New York Times* article)
5. Description of the author’s purpose
6. Description of the article’s audience
7. A word count that observes length restrictions—75 for editorials, 175 for op-eds
8. Control of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure